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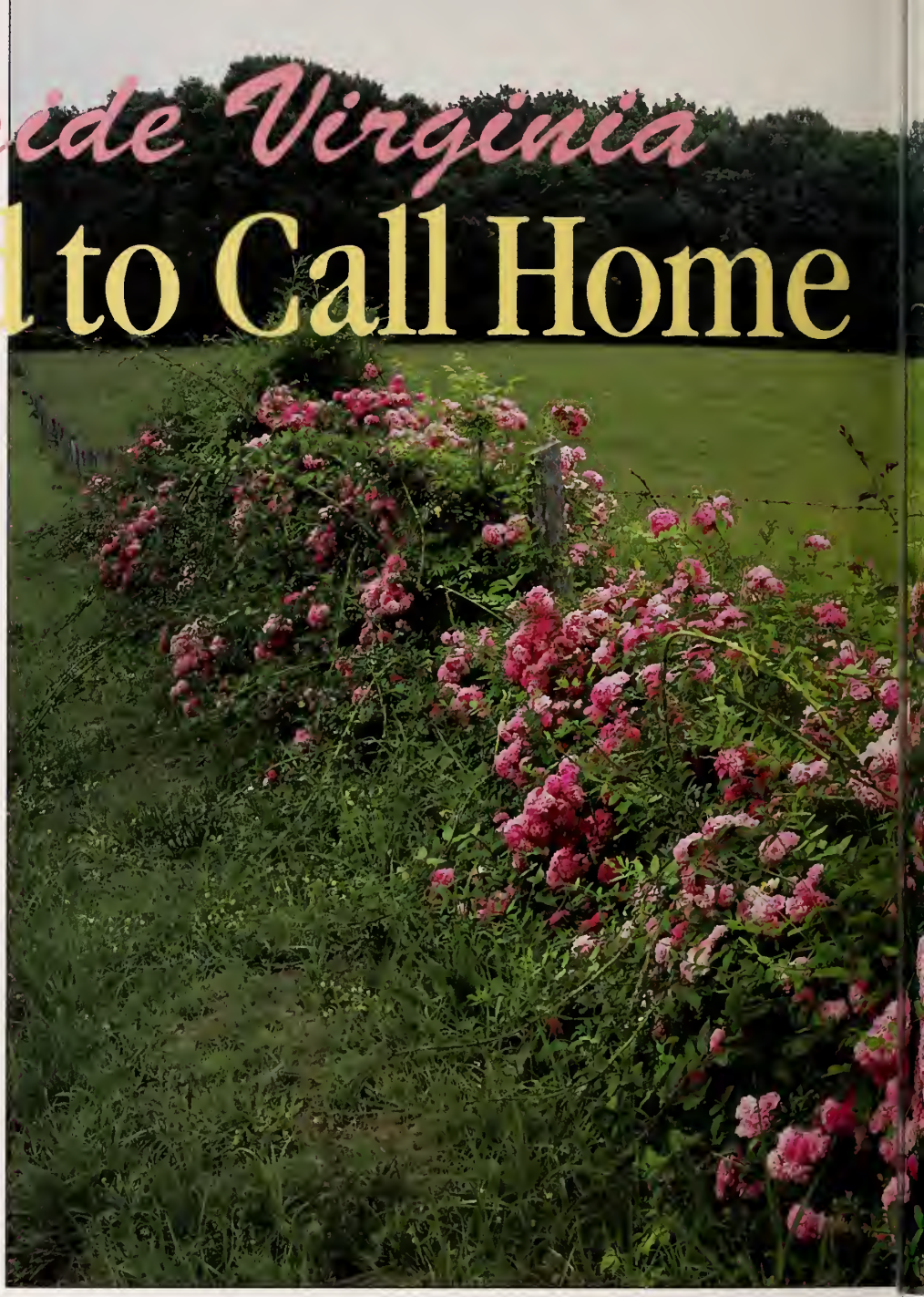
Southside Virginia
A Special Photo Issue

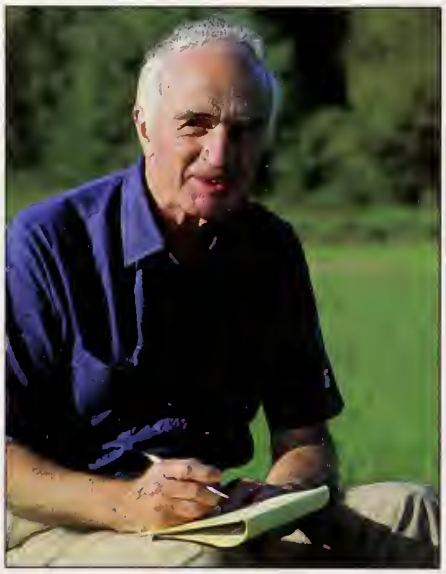
Southside Virginia
A Land to Call Home



Introduction
by Bob Gooch

Southside Virginia is unique country with a unique lifestyle. Its northern and southern boundaries are highly definitive, the James River to the north and the North Carolina border to the south. But imaginary lines mark its eastern and western borders. Draw them to suit your own image of the country. Somewhere out west where the rolling hills give way to mountains, Southside merges with southwest Virginia, and to the east it loses itself in the flat coastal plains of Tidewater.

But the prototype Southsider is neither a mountaineer nor a flatlander. Rolling hill country graced by fields of ripe tobacco, crops of rich grain, grazing cattle, and ever-increasing stands of young loblolly pines are symbols of the country he lives in and loves.



Cover: Tobacco field in Campbell County.
Above right: *Southside Virginia fencerow.*
Above: *Bob Gooch; photos by Dwight Dyke.*

Lose yourself for a few hours south of the James River, drive leisurely down its back roads, stop to visit at a crossroads store, check with a fisherman watching a couple of bobbers in a slow-flowing creek, and you will absorb the atmosphere of Southside Virginia. It's relaxing. If you've been around for awhile, it may take you back to a slower-paced age, when friends and neighbors found time to pass the time of day with each other.

But the country is not backward. In fact, it's very progressive, but somehow its people have been able to enjoy progress without losing touch with the land or the simpler

pleasures of life. It's the kind of life most of us see only when we plan vacations somewhere outside of the mainstream.

Progress and a changing economy are slowly taking its toll, however. Tobacco, the very backbone of the Southside agricultural economy, is fading before crusades against smoking and strict government controls. Some landowners have switched to cattle, but with limited success. Third and fourth generation landowners are finding it increasingly difficult to carry on the family tradition of living off the land. Some are selling out to timber companies who convert once-fertile farm lands to pine plantations, and others to newcomers whose economic status doesn't demand a profit from the land.

But others, heirs to farms of all sizes, feel too strong a tie to the land to live anywhere else. Some are experimenting with other ways to put their land to productive use. Others supplement farming income with regular jobs in industry. A spouse may work outside of the home.

Blessed with a work ethic learned on Southside Virginia farms, many heirs to its land seem destined to preserve a life-style that so many Americans possibly once knew—and others yearn for. □

Above and inset: *Farming is a way of life in Southside Virginia.*
Opposite top: *Students at Hampden-Sydney College in Farmville.*
Opposite bottom: *Jim Eanes of the* ***Crewe-Burkeville Journal****; photos by Dwight Dyke.*

"Southside is rural America, where its people live close to the land and farms are passed on from generation to generation."

— Jim Eanes, editor of the weekly ***Crewe-Burkeville Journal***

"Farm life provides family values, work opportunities for all members of the family, and teaches a work ethic and a sense of values."

—Dr. Bill Burger, Appomattox County veterinarian

***Top**: Appomattox Court House National Historical Park.*
***Above**: Dr. Bill Burger, Appomattox County.*
***Opposite**: Children in a pumpkin patch, Red House, VA.*
***Inset**: Early's Chapel Methodist Church, Campbell County; photos by Dwight Dyke.*

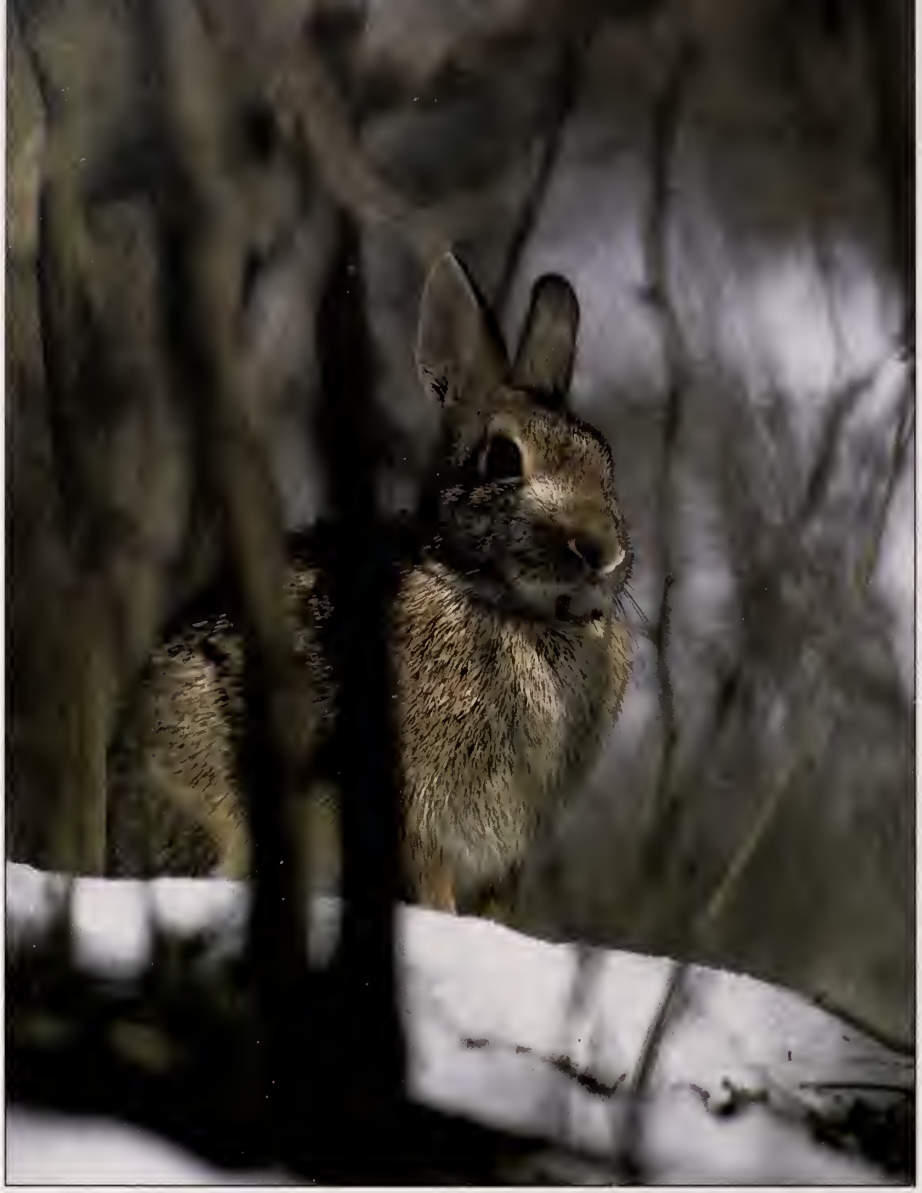
"I was born in Michigan and was in such poor health as a boy that my father moved the family to Virginia, hoping the change would be good for me. He took me to the local doctor, a tough, old fellow who hunted and fished a lot. He told my father: 'Buy the boy a .22 rifle, teach him how to use it, and let him loose in the woods.' That was the end of my health problems. I took my last turkey when I was 80 years old. My wife Vara has cooked enough wild turkeys to feed an army."

—Frank Hanenkrat, Appomattox County

Opposite: Wild turkey; photo by Lloyd B. Hill.
Inset: Frank Hanenkrat, Appomattox County; photo by Dwight Dyke.
Above: Pointer puppies; photo by Dwight Dyke. Inset right: Southside rabbit hunter; photo by Dwight Dyke.

"Local hunters bring their dogs in and ask me to fix them—but not without emotion. The Texas oil men who kennel their dogs here, on the other hand, just send word to 'fix them.'"

—Dr. Bill Burger, Appomattox County



***Top left**: Cottontail rabbit; photo by Vinyard Bros.*
***Bottom left**: Gray squirrel; photo by Gary M. Carter.*
***Above**: Charlie Hunter, Appomattox County; photo by Dwight Dyke.*

"I'm over 60 years old. I hunt rabbits and squirrels. No deer."

—Charlie Hunter, Appomattox County tobacco farmer

"I just fish now. I'll hunt when I get bigger."

—Cordolor Wright, age 5, Charlotte County

"I was born in Keysville. I like the peace and quiet. I can leave my keys in the car."

—Debbie Reynolds, Red House
(Member of a four-generation family still living on the same land)

***Opposite**: Staunton River State Park, Halifax County.*
***Inset**: Cordolor Wright (**left**) and Johnny Pollard (**right**).*
***This page**: Old store, Ebony, VA. **Inset**: Debbie Reynolds, Red House; photos by Dwight Dyke.*

"If you take a ride down River Road, you'll see old homes and old boxwoods and what we call "old fashioned" Virginia pines maybe three feet in diameter alongside the road. You can feel the presence of what went before."

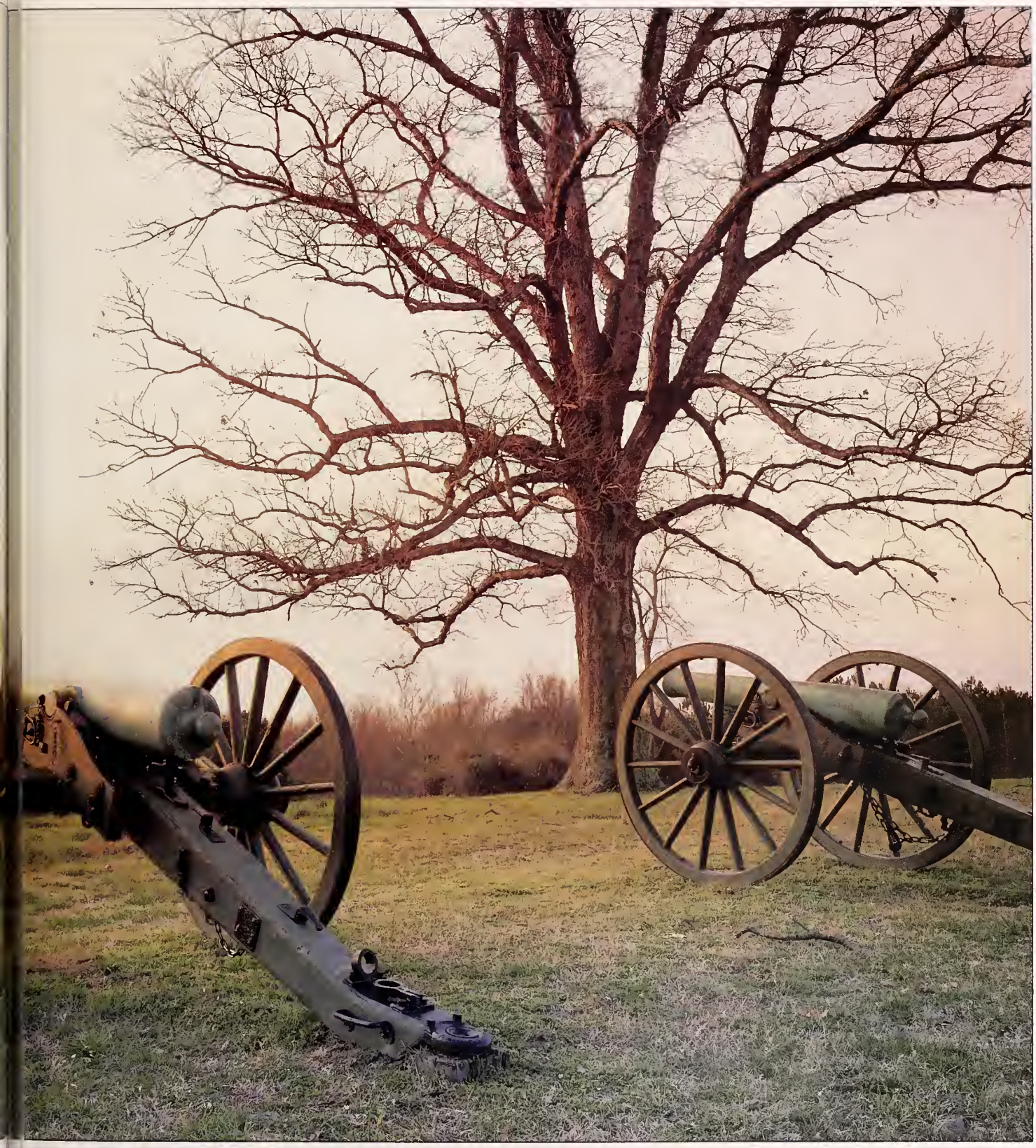
—James Edmunds, Halifax

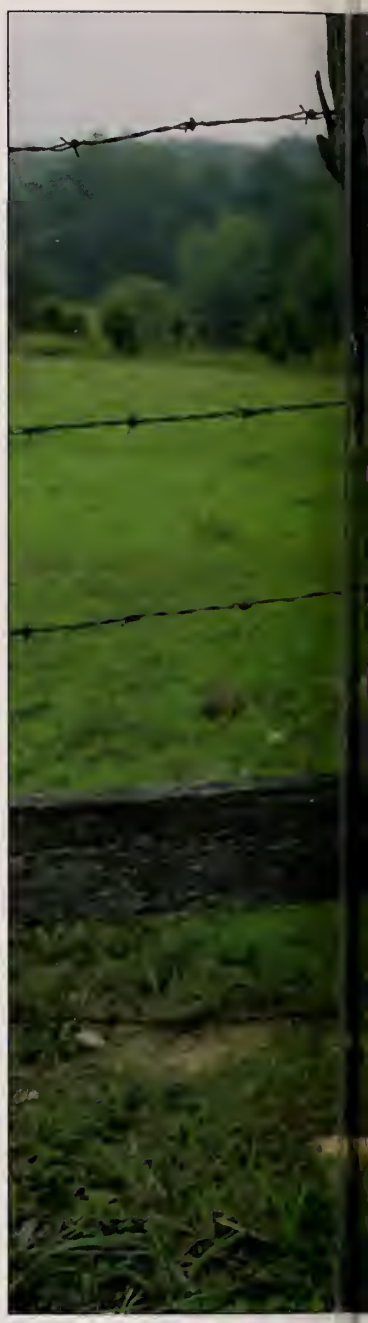
***Above**: Appomattox Manor, part of the Petersburg National Military Park, Hopewell.*
***Top right**: Red Hill, home of Patrick Henry, Charlotte County.*
***Bottom right**: Appomattox Court House National Historical Park; photos by Dwight Dyke.*

"I can just see a horse pulling a wagon through the mud on the old wagon trail that went to Danville. It just takes you back."

—James Edmunds, Halifax

***Top**: Prestwould Plantation, circa 1790, Mecklenburg County.*
***Above**: Westover Plantation, Hopewell.* ***Right**: Petersburg National Battlefield Park; photos by Dwight Dyke.*





***Above**: Southside farm.*
***Below**: James Edmunds, Halifax; photos by Dwight Dyke.*

"There's a pride here in the ownership of property."

—James Edmunds, Halifax

Above: Charlotte County farm. Below: Ricky "Slick" Pollock, Charlotte County; photos by Dwight Dyke.

"Southside to me means close family, farming, gardening, people helping each other—and knowing all your neighbors."

—Debbie Reynolds, Red House

A Hunting and Fishing Tradition

by Bob Gooch

Hunting and fishing have been an integral part of life in Southside Virginia since long before it was settled by white man. It is no less so today.

Traditionally, that hunting has been for the farm species; quail, rabbits, and squirrels. And turkeys in parts of the region.

No lesser a hunter than the immortal Havilah Babcock learned to hunt and fish in his native Appomattox County. Now deceased, his books such as *I Don't Want to Shoot an Elephant* and *Jay Birds Go to Hell on Friday,* have now become classics. One of his favorite hunting partners was Frank Hanenkrat, widely known for his turkey hunting prowess and his

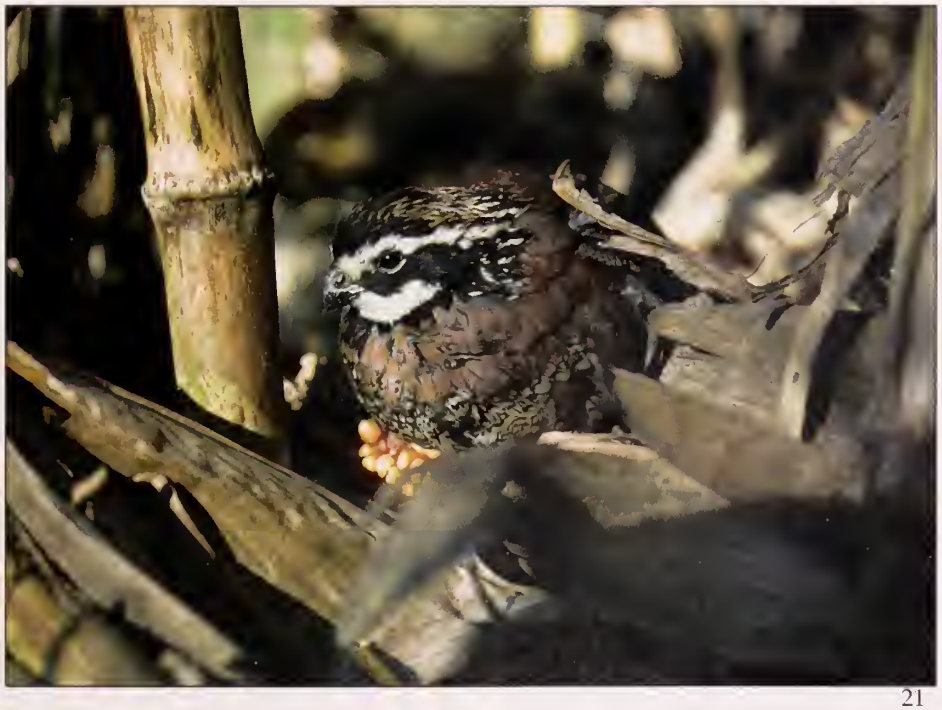
Above: Photo by Dwight Dyke.
Top right: *Raccoon; photo by Lloyd B. Hill.*
Bottom right: *Bobwhite quail; photo by Lloyd B. Hill.*

book, *The Education of a Turkey Hunter.* Babcock also hunted turkeys, but his favorite game was the classy bobwhite quail. Hanenkrat, now in his 80's, still lives in Appomattox.

The rich agricultural economy of Southside Virginia provided plenty of cover and food for quail and rabbits, and farm hardwood lots supported unlimited hunting opportunities for squirrels. Hunting squirrels in early September while they are "cutting nuts" enjoys a rich tradition in most Southside counties, one that the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries recognized recently when it overhauled the squirrel hunting seasons.

Night hunting was also popular and still is. Crack hounds to chase and tree bobcats, raccoons, and even opossums, are prize possessions with top ones carrying price tags of a thousand dollars or more.

Fishing doesn't enjoy the rich tradition that hunting does. Initially, it was pretty much limited to creeks and rivers, but the coming of impoundments ranging in size from small farm ponds to giant Buggs Island Lake changed the attitude toward fishing. Today some of the best bass anglers in Virginia live in Southside.



To simply say that the reintroduction of the white-tailed deer to Southside Virginia changed the complexion of hunting would be an understatement. With the changes in farming patterns and the loss of patch farming which provided ideal habitat for quail and rabbits, avid small game hunters began to see their favorite game dwindle. Many simply turned to the ever-growing deer populations. Hunting deer with hounds became almost a way of life.

Just how far this trend will go is yet to be determined. Bird hunters are not yet ready to give up the sight of classy pointing dogs seemingly set in concrete in fields of waving broom sedge, nor are rabbit hunters willing to forgo the sharp cries of little beagle hounds on a frosty winter morning.

Southside Virginia was never without its wild turkeys, but today there are more of them and they are more widely distributed. Just ask Frank Hanenkrat.

But nothing can replace the explosive flush of a covey of bobwhites, the sight of a racing cottontail darting through a thicket, or a gray squirrel chomping nuts high in a hickory tree. That's Southside hunting as it was known for generations. □

Right: *White-tailed buck.*
Below: *Bobcat with prey; photos by Bill Lea.*
Opposite page: *Hunting in the Southside (**top**); photo by Dwight Dyke.*
Bottom: *Opossum; photo by David Vinyard.*

"Havilah Babcock and I were good friends. We hunted together. I met him when I had a gunsmith shop up the street."

—Frank Hanenkrat, well-known Appomattox County turkey hunter

"My father was a farmer. My grandfather had an ice-cream company, Blue Ribbon Dairy in Halifax and he put fruit from his orchards in the ice cream. People have told me that during the Depression he'd take ice cream to the storekeepers and say, 'Pay me when you can.' It's still like that around here today."

—James Edmunds, Halifax

Top: *Brunner's Store, Cumberland County.* ***Above:*** *Country store, Volens, VA.* ***Opposite:*** *Winfall Depot, Winfall, VA* ***(top)****. Old train depot, Appomattox* ***(bottom)****. Photos by Dwight Dyke.*

"A lot of these old country stores date back no telling how long."

—James Edmunds, Halifax

"Tobacco is just a sideline for me. I'm just piddling at it. I'm in the logging business. Mostly pulpwood."

—James Cordell, logger in Red House

***Top**: Harvested Southside tobacco. **Inset**: James Cordell of Red House checks his drying tobacco. **Opposite**: Southside bean field. **Inset**: Lonnie Reynolds, Red House; photos by Dwight Dyke.*

"We've been in the produce business for six years, having gotten out of the tobacco business. My father owned a store and farm, but the store is now rented out. Four generations of family live on this land. We moved here from Pittsylvania County 45 years ago."

—Lonnie Reynolds, Red House

Above: Mecklenburg County. ***Below:*** *Mark Morrison, Charlotte County; photos by Dwight Dyke.*

"We're expecting frost tonight, and we have to get this tobacco in the barn."

—Mark Morrison, member of three-generation Charlotte County tobacco growing family with 100 acres to be harvested

Above: Old farm house in Southampton County. ***Below:*** *Campbell County tobacco farmer; photos by Dwight Dyke.*

"You get the feeling here in Southside of being somewhere that's well taken care of. From a two-acre gardener to a 1000-acre tobacco farmer, we take care of the land, and the beauty of it sets it apart. Everyone has a pride in it."

—James Edmunds, Halifax

Above: Mecklenburg County. ***Inset****: Campbell County; photos by Dwight Dyke.*

"I grew up helping neighbors. If I want some city life, Lynchburg is close by, but sometimes I wish it were further away."

—Debbie Reynolds, Red House

Top: *St. Paul's College, Brunswick County.* ***Above:*** *Booker T. Washington National Monument, Franklin County; photos by Dwight Dyke.*

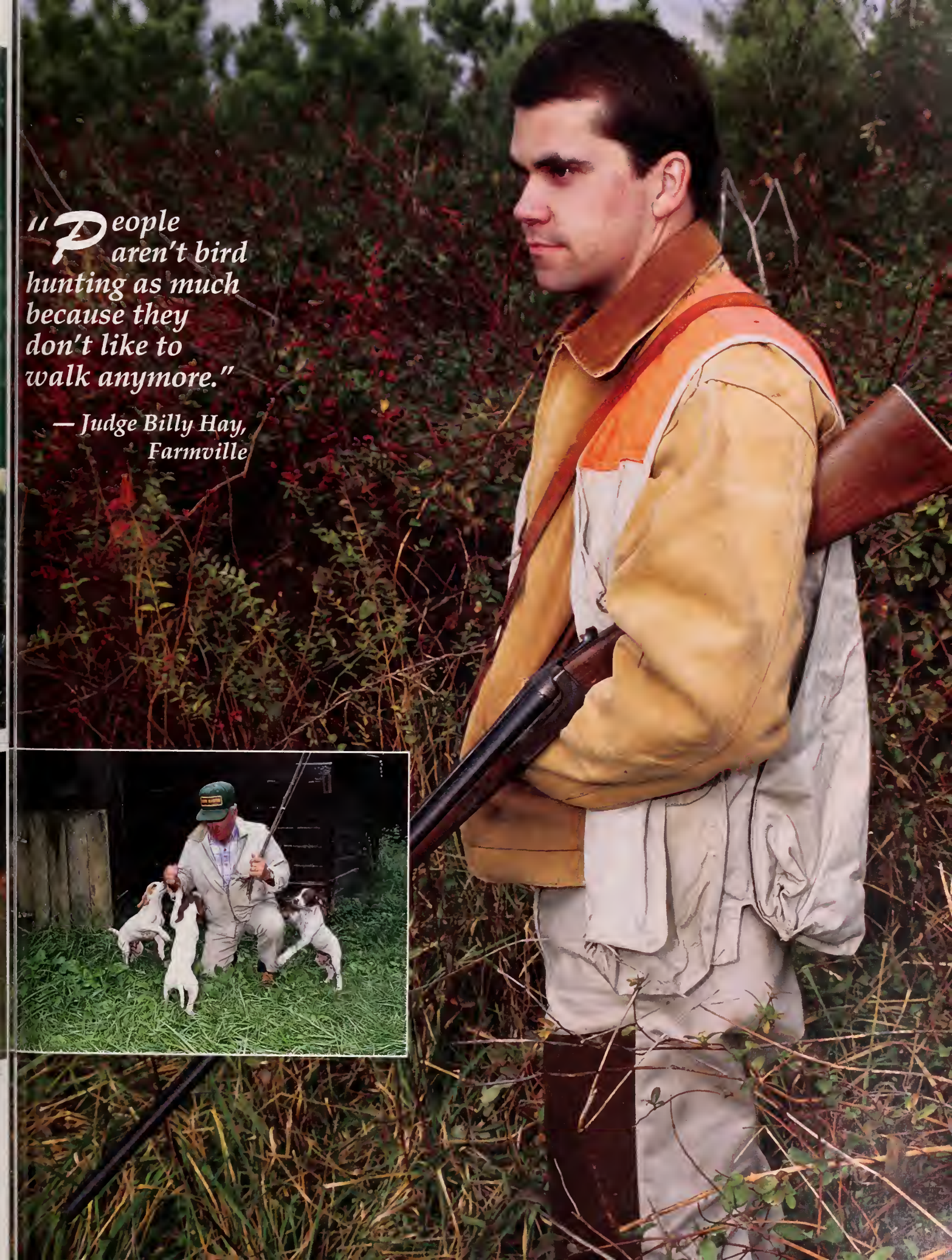
"You're getting ready to see the end of a generation that cared for and needed the land. I hate to say it, but the people coming up now don't respect the land like the ones who depended on it for life did... But right now, it sure is nice."

—James Edmunds, Halifax

"Uncle Havilah was my uncle. I started hunting and fishing with him back in 1925 when I was 10 years old. Uncle Havilah loved to set out trotlines on the James River. We would check them together and catch eels, a few snakes, turtles, and lots of fish."

—Webb Babcock, Appomattox County

***Top**: Smith Mountain Lake, Pittsylvania County. **Above**: Webb Babcock, Appomattox County. **Opposite**: Hunter, farmer and landowner James Edmunds. **Inset**: Judge Billy Hay, Farmville; photos by Dwight Dyke.*



"People aren't bird hunting as much because they don't like to walk anymore."

— Judge Billy Hay, Farmville

Roots, Rhythm, and Film

Above: *Halifax County.* ***Inset:*** *Dwight Dyke.* ***Opposite:*** *Lake Gaston, Brunswick County.* ***Inset:*** *Moses Williams, Mecklenburg County; photos by Dwight Dyke.*

by Dwight Dyke

O.K., so you have this assignment to capture on film the essence of Southside Virginia. The people, the land, the heritage of a region that is so entwined with the deepest roots of our country.

The first things that you notice about Southside are the things that you don't notice. No ground-hugging, yellow-gray clouds of pollution floating on the horizon and assailing your nostrils; no billboards growing like grotesque mushrooms from the red earth—blocking your vision from all messages except their own; no buses belching their black smoke and stinging your eyes.

Quite frankly, Southside Virginia is friendly to your senses. That's the first thing you realize. But, of course, there must be more to the story of this gently rolling land of crops and cattle.

As you travel the back roads and farm lanes, as you walk the fields, share meals and talk with the people, you realize quite suddenly what the key to this region is: Rhythm. Everything is in sync with nature. As trees are cut, more are planted. As crops sprout from the earth and are harvested, the earth is replenished. Children are raised and there is a place for them.

It wouldn't be accurate to say that the homogenization of our nation hasn't reached into Southside and caused changes. But it hasn't changed the important things. There is still the closeness to the soil and the seasons that, in turn, sets the pace for life here.

Early morning is the best time to experience Southside. The warm glow of the low sun bathes the landscape in a soft light that assures a permanence to the old barns and country stores that seem to sprout from the endless fields of soybeans, corn and tobacco. The photographer's challenge is not to just record these images, but somehow to capture on a piece of film the profound feeling of peace and harmony that exists here. I hope that we've done a little of that, because all of our lives are enriched just knowing that Southside is still there.

"The only thing bothering me today is the fish ain't biting like they oughta."

—Moses Williams, Mecklenburg County